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WHY THE MASONIC LODGE?

GREAT TEACHINGS OF MASONRY. By H. L. Haywood editor of THE BUILDER. Published by George H. Doran, New York, as Vol. 11, M.S.A. National Masonic Library. For sale by National Masonic Research Society. Blue cloth, index, bibliography, 187 pages. Price, postpaid, $2.15.

AN observer of an inquiring turn of mind looking down from a circling airplane upon Main Street, anywhere in America, might reasonably ask himself, Why all this apparently aimless hurrying to and fro ? At intervals the streets are full of people madly dashing about. Presto! They become empty again. Everybody has disappeared somewhither. What has become of them? What objective induces folk thus to hurry from hither to yon ?

If our fancied observer seriously desired an answer to his question he would do well to come down to earth, take note of the place, time, and manner in which people assemble in groups and inquire under what leadership and for what purposes they come together. A community may best be judged by its groupments, its homes, churches, schools, places of business and amusement - in a word, its institutions - and by the manner and extent to which they are frequented; an individual, by the way, divides his time and thought among them. To make the point clear, one may ask oneself, What would Main Street be like if its schools, its churches or its lodges were incontinently sponged out of existence ? How would the lives of Dr. and Mrs. Kennicut and their neighbors be affected? Which brings us to our question, Why the Masonic Lodge?

One has only to walk with a limp to discover how many people have a touch of rheumatism now and again, and the fact that Freemasonry is the thing uppermost in my own mind may account for the number of questions that come to me, directly or indirectly, as to the worth-whileness of the Masonic Lodge.

I don't know how many Masons of more or less prominence in public life, whom I have approached to act as speakers or in connection with civic work, have admitted that they rarely enter a Masonic Lodge unless invited to make an address. One of my oldest friends, a man active in affairs, was made a Mason at the same time as myself. I venture to guess that he does not attend lodge once a year. Another, the president of a thriving business enterprise, now in his second year as a Mason, tells me that he does not yet see what inducement there is to attend lodge at all!

All of these men value their membership in the Fraternity very highly. They pay their dues. They could in no wise be indeed to dimit. Yet they do not appreciate the activities of the lodge enough to attend its meetings. Nor is their attitude different to that of three-quarters or more of the Fraternity For lodge attendance continues to hover around 20 per cent And the number of unaffiliates grows apace.

Doubtless the World War, or its aftermath, has called into question the worth-whileness of Freemasonry along with that of every other human institution. Perhaps the many hundreds of thousands of men who

have been made Masons during and since the war are voicing this query. Maybe the great Masonic temples and memorials that are rising upon every hand art provoking inquiries. Possibly our feasting, dancing and gratulation are attracting a dubious attention. At all events, unless I am the more mistaken, the number of persons is increasing both within and without the Fraternity whose attitude toward the Craft has in it an element of dubiety, if not of challenge.

As to the public, possibly the traditional attitude of silence and secrecy is still justifiable. Possibly not. Opinions will differ on that question. As to all who are entitled to Masonic light, there can be no two opinions. Every Master Mason should be able intelligently to state the reasons for the faith that is in him. All should receive enlightenment to the uttermost degree.

The need of the hour and the man of the. hour have happily met in the publication by the editor of THE BUILDER of the most recent, the most acceptable and, one is tempted to say, the only adequate answer to challenging inquirers, *The Great Teachings of Freemasonry*, which appeared as a volume of the National Masonic Library.

The joyous and refreshing appeal of this particular volume is not merely its newness. A number of Masonic books of exceptional merit have recently appeared. The extraordinary virtue of this book is its modern-mindedness. Here at last is a book on Masonry that a business man, a mechanic, a school teacher, a society woman, can read with pleasure and understanding. This book any ordinary person would be disposed to leave lying about the living room or take upon a journey, or recommend casually to a friend, and could do so without suspicion of being a propagandist.

Haywood's *Great Teachings*, in short, is a plain, simple, straightforward contribution to current literature. The subject is one in which the general public is, and has a right to be, genuinely interested. The style is pitched upon a literary plane distinctly above the ordinary, but is withal so simple that a child can understand it. Here is a book equally as interesting to a profane as to a member of the Craft.

Bro. Haywood faces squarely the question: "Why the Masonic Lodge?" or, in his phrase; "What is it all about ? " He ! explains with sweet reasonableness and engaging candor why Masonry employs ritual and symbolism, the meaning of initiation and secrecy, and the Masonic theory of the good life. The fact that Masons meet upon the level leads him naturally to show why Freemasonry is the champion of liberty and democracy. He makes clear how the brotherhood of man, as understood by Freemasons, underlies their attitude toward religion and gives the Craft its universality as a world-wide institution. He points out that belief in the brotherhood of man implies faith in the Fatherhood of God and in the endless life, and shows how naturally brotherly love expresses itself in brotherly aid and charity. The Masonic conception of human nature as educable finds expression in the motto of the Fraternity, “Let there be light.” This affords a firm basis for the comprehensive interest of the Craft in all means and agencies for education, especially the American free public school system. The lodge itself is depicted as a school for the inculcation of the "Great Teachings" of the Fraternity. Thus the very table of contents of this noteworthy addition to our literature lends itself to simplicity of exposition and comes home, in the phrase of Bacon, to men's business and bosoms.

Liberty, democracy, industry, religion, brotherhood, charity, education - what more significant or more timely watchwords could be selected for an institution which numbers millions of members in its world-wide distribution and takes rank with the home, school and the church as among the most

universally present and active institutions in American life! Each peals out like a bugle call a challenge to worthwhile service. Each is eloquent, not only of individual self-expression and self-development - character building - but also of social and civic cooperation for the common weal.

The question whether the Craft is discharging its full responsibilities to its members, to community, state and nation, and to mankind, has been generally agitated during and since the World War, and there has arisen in certain quarters a strong demand for "direct action." Attention is called to the prestige, number, wealth and potential influence of the Craft, and it is argued that steps should be taken to line up on a united front, bring about effective mass action in favor of those things for which Freemasons traditionally stand - such, for example, as the improvement of the public schools - and bear down opposition. Conservative brethren, on the other hand, call to mind the landmarks prohibiting political and sectarian discussion under lodge auspices and deprecate departure from the time-honored routine of the standard work.

Nothing could be more timely, or helpful, to progressives and conservatives alike, than a fresh analysis and interpretation of Masonic fundamentals in the light of modern scholarship and present day conditions. The most extreme schools of Masonic opinion can find common ground in Bro. Haywood's presentation of the great teachings of the Craft. Each will be helped to see the other's point of view. All will be enabled to stand together on his broad platform and continue working in fraternal harmony and brotherly love for the common weal.

The educational programs of the National Masonic Research Society and the Masonic Service Association, and of the various Grand Lodge Bureaus organized under their inspiration or auspices, have enormously increased the demand among lodges for Masonic speakers. One of the most serious problems in connection with this effort is that of supplying in sufficient number speakers who can be relied upon to keep their remarks within due compass and square them by the ancient landmarks. No book yet published could be more helpful in clarifying the mind of a- speaker, or more useful in the preparation of Masonic addresses, than Haywood’s *Great Teachings*. May it find its way into the hands of all who have occasion to counsel and direct the Craft.

Sidney Morse.